

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 5, 2013

---

## Panel OKs using state funds for teacher pay (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

A House committee Thursday endorsed legislation that would allow school districts to use Educational Excellence Trust Fund money to pay for step increases in salary for educators with advanced degrees and experience.

The Arkansas Education Association, the organization representing the state's teachers, strenuously objected, saying the changes contemplated by House Bill 1761 would "actually work against raising salaries."

The fund routes state money to school districts across the state - an estimated \$193 million in fiscal 2013 - and all of it is earmarked for teacher salaries.

"I have to say that in all the years - in more than 35 years - that I have been working, in part, to raise teacher salaries, the state of Arkansas never did anything better or more significant than establishing that fund," said Rich Nagle, the executive director of the Arkansas Education Association.

The trust fund was established more than 20 years ago as a way to ensure some state money for schools would be set aside to boost teacher salaries, then among the lowest in the nation.

House Bill 1761 requires the removal of one word, "not," to allow the use of that state aid for increasing teacher pay without necessarily increasing the salary schedule. The new language, if enacted, would read, "'Salary increase,' as used in this section, shall include increments for experience or advanced hours or degrees."

Backers of the bill sponsored by Rep. James Ratliff, D-Imboden, said the language in the law results in disparities in teacher salaries across the state.

The Springdale School District has among the highest teacher salaries in the state, in part, because of the quirk in the law.

In Springdale, falling property values brought about by the recession have lowered the amount of local revenue the school district receives even while its enrollment grows, Richard Stipe, treasurer for the Bryant School District, testified.

To keep per pupil funding level, the state makes up the difference. Part of that so called foundation aid is from the Educational Excellence Trust Fund. When a district receives more money from that fund than it did the previous year, it is required to devote all of that extra money to teacher salaries, which

results in the district increasing its salary schedule, Stipe said. There's no cap on how high the salaries can go.

Still other districts that either don't have growing enrollment or rely more on local funding aren't seeing the same increases in money from the trust fund and therefore aren't required to boost teacher salaries, he said.

"The disparity between low salaries in some districts and higher salaries schedules in other districts, that tends to be growing farther apart," Stipe said.

Nagle said the average teacher salary in Arkansas has increased less than 2 percent annually over the past five years. In two of the years, the average increase was less than 1 percent.

"Without the increases required by the trust fund legislation, there may not have been any increase in average teacher salary in one of the last five years," he said. "It would be a serious mistake to allow the increases in the trust fund to be used for increments, either for education ... or for experience."

---

## **Lead poisoning toll revised to 1 in 38 young kids (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

NEW YORK — More than half a million U.S. children are now believed to have lead poisoning, roughly twice the previous high estimate, health officials reported Thursday.

The increase is the result of the government last year lowering the threshold for lead poisoning, so now more children are considered at risk.

Too much lead can harm developing brains and can mean a lower IQ. Lead poisoning used to be a much larger concern in the United States, but has declined significantly as lead was removed from paint and gasoline and other sources.

The new number translates to about 1 in 38 young children. That estimate suggests a need for more testing and preventive measures, some experts said, but budget cuts last year eliminated federal grant funding for such programs.

Those cuts represent "an abandonment of children," said David Rosner, a Columbia University public health historian who writes books about lead poisoning.

"We've been acting like the problem was solved and this was a thing of the past," he added.

Lead can harm a child's brain, kidneys and other organs. High levels in the blood can cause coma, convulsions and death. Lower levels can reduce intelligence, impair hearing and behavior and cause other problems.

Most cases of lead poisoning are handled by tracking and removing the lead source, and monitoring the children to make sure lead levels stay down. A special treatment to remove lead and other heavy metals is used only for extremely high levels.

Often, children who get lead poisoning live in old homes that are dilapidated or under renovation. They pick up paint chips or dust and put it in their mouth. Other sources include soil contaminated by old leaded gasoline, dust from industrial worksites and tainted drinking water

Lead has been banned in household paint since 1978 and was gone from gasoline by the late 1980s.

---

### **Little Rock School District holds meeting for anti-bullying plans (KTHV, Channel 11)**

Video available at <http://www.thv11.com/news/article/258501/2/LRSD-holds-meeting-for-anti-bullying-plans>

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (KTHV) -- The Little Rock School District held the first of several anti-bullying meetings Thursday evening.

The advisory committee discussed plans to address bullying within the school district and plan to conduct studies, identify problems and develop recommendations to improve ways to deal with bullying.

Julian Calzada, a representative from LULAC, said it's important to bring such a diverse group of people together.

"It's the general public coming together to bring up some fresh ideas on a universal problem that affects everybody in the families and especially the school students, of course. And trying to get something implemented to the school board and that will hope to correct the problem or try to fix the problem," she said.

This committee -- made up of parents, faith-based organizations, community members, students and district staff -- will continue meet once a month.

---

### **Some Early Childhood Education Facilities Could See More Money (KARK, Channel 4)**

LITTLE ROCK, AR -- More money is now available to spruce up early childhood education facilities across the State of Arkansas.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services is accepting applications from facilities with low-to-moderate-income students.

These facilities must be located in rural parts of the state.

The money will go toward construction and improvements.

"A lot of times the facilities that we have access to are older buildings, and so this just gives us an opportunity to really have state-of-the-art, or updated facilities," Director of Childcare and Early Childhood Tonya Russell said.

The Arkansas Community and Economic Development provides the funding and makes the final decision on who receives grant money.

All applications need to be submitted to DHS no later than May 1.

---

### **Governor Names April Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month at Shelter Banquet (KARK, Channel 4)**

He made the declaration as the guest of honor among other notable guests at the Open Arms Shelter's "Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Banquet" in Cabot Thursday night.

The event helped raise money for the shelters in Central Arkansas.

The Governor says Open Arms' history made it an easy decision to make this declaration at their event.

He said, "Declaring the month and heightening the awareness for all of our people is a part of my job and one I'm happy to do."

In honor of naming the month the Bank of America building in downtown Little Rock will display a blue ribbon starting April 8th -- 22nd.

---

### **ES superintendent up for job at Mineral Springs Saratoga (Lovely County Citizen)**

According to the Southwest Arkansas News, Superintendent Curtis Turner of the Eureka Springs School District was interviewed on Monday, March 25, by the Mineral Springs Saratoga School Board for the superintendent's position.

Assistant Superintendent Jeanie Gorham of the Mineral Springs Saratoga School District confirmed that Turner had interviewed along with four others last week.

"Our school district is in financial distress, so we are awaiting a call from Hazel Burnett, the chief financial officer of the state department, who must approve everyone we hire," she said. "We do have a school board meeting schedule for April 8, and word on the street is they hope to complete hiring all personnel at that time, including a new superintendent. Call me again next week and I'll let you know what happens."

Eureka School Board member Jason Morris expressed surprise at the news. "It's news to me," he said. "However, a person's got a right to work where they want and be happy in their work."

School Board President Al Larson agreed. "I could understand," he said. "It's the part of the state where he's from, and he has a lot of expertise in schools under financial distress. I know he would be missed."

Turner is a 1969 Murfreesboro High School graduate who has been in education for 34 years. He taught in Delight, Ark., initially and was the superintendent at Murfreesboro, Glenwood/Centerpoint and Delight school districts prior to coming to Eureka Springs.

Turner also previously worked for the Arkansas Department of Education specializing in helping schools with financial difficulties.

---

## **Arkansas Legislature: Senate OKs Fee Hike, Teacher Ethics Bills (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)**

LITTLE ROCK — The Senate approved legislation Thursday to raise fees on companies that store hazardous waste and to create an ethics violation for a teacher found to have had an inappropriate relationship with a student.

The House approved a bill asserting that life begins at conception as far as state criminal and wrongful death statutes are concerned.

House Bill 1886 by Rep. Andrea Lea, R-Russellville, would raise the annual fee that companies pay the state Department of Emergency Management annually when reporting their chemical inventory stored at their facilities. The fee would double from \$25 to \$50. Fees for filing additional reports and for filing reports after a toxic chemical release also would rise.

The bill passed 22-11 and goes to the governor.

Presenting the bill on the Senate floor, Sen. Missy Irvin, R-Mountain View, said that while fee increases are not something she generally supports, the fee increases in SB 1011 were necessary to support the hazardous materials program and training in the state.

State Emergency Management Director David Maxwell said later the fee increases would generate as much as \$130,000 a year, and the money would go toward training local hazardous materials units across the state.

"We do the bulk of the hazmat training for the state, all of the hazardous materials training, volunteers, local units, we do all that training," Maxwell said.

"There is a cost associated with the Department of Emergency Management, dealing with hazardous materials and the procedures that occur ... it's not free," Irvin said in an interview.

The Senate also passed SB 1011 by Irvin, which would establish a specific violation of the code of ethics for educators suspected of being involved in an inappropriate relationship with a student.

The bill passed 34-0 and goes to the House.

Under the bill, a teacher suspected of being involved in an inappropriate relationship with a student could be referred to the Professional Licensure Standards Board or the State Board of Education, even if the teacher is not prosecuted by law enforcement.

“It could very well happen that no charges are pressed, or the family decides not to press charges. The teacher is then given an opportunity to resign from the school and they go to other schools for employment,” Irvin said after the vote. “While it’s not considered child abuse, the very least it should be an ethics violation.”

She said the ethics violation would be on file with the state or the licensure standards board.

“It would be part of a database open to the public, and when an administrator goes to hire someone, they can do a criminal background check ... and check for an ethics violation,” Irvin said.

Meanwhile, the House voted 75-4 to approve SB 417 by Sen. Jim Hendren, R-Gravette, which would make a person who harms a fetus at any point from conception to birth subject to criminal charges and wrongful-death lawsuits. Current law allows criminal charges and civil suits against a person who harms a fetus 12 weeks or later into a pregnancy.

The bill goes to the Senate for concurrence in two House amendments.

The House rejected SB 1075 by Sen. Jake Files, R-Fort Smith, which would raise the excise tax on alternative fuels from 5 cents per cubic foot to 21.5 cents per cubic foot. The increase would be phased in gradually over the next four years.

The bill initially passed in a 52-26 vote, but after the vote several members asked to sound the ballot, a procedure requiring members to be in their seats for their votes to be counted. The second count was 50-26, so the bill failed. It needed 51 to pass.

The House approved a motion by Rep. John T. Vines, D-Hot Springs, to reconsider its Wednesday vote rejecting HB 1938 by Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville. The bill, which would impose a two-year moratorium on school district mergers related to enrollment, had failed Wednesday in a 46-26 vote. It failed again Thursday in a 49-20 vote.

The House approved several other bills, including:

- HB 1489 by Hammer, under which a student who receives a lottery-funded scholarship and fails to earn any credit hours in the first semester of the school year would not receive funding from the program for the second semester. The bill passed 76-3 and goes to the Senate.
- HB 1737 by Rep. Charlie Collins, R-Fayetteville, which would limit the size of a voting precinct to 3,000 registered voters. The bill passed in a 54-13 vote and goes to the Senate.
- HB 2090 by Rep. Mary Broadaway, D-Paragould, under which the interest rate in a contract that does not specify a rate would be 6 percent per year. The bill passed 54-26 and goes to the Senate.

- HB 1448 by Rep. Charlene Fite, R-Van Buren, which would give courts discretion to issue extended no-contact orders in cases involving egregious crimes such as rape, kidnapping and murder. The bill passed 84-1 and goes to the Senate.
- HB 2108 by Rep. Stephanie Malone, R-Fort Smith, which would assess a \$25 fee on anyone convicted of an offense involving domestic violence, with the money going to fund crisis shelters. The bill passed 74-3 and goes to the Senate.

The Senate also passed:

- HB 1355 by Rep. Butch Wilkins, D-Bono, 29-3. The bill would align the state's penalties related to violations of lead-based paint rules with those required by federal law. The bill passed 29-3 and goes to the governor.
- HB 1867 by Hammer, which would require that a public servant or public official found guilty of certain offenses repay his or her debt and a portion of his or her salary. The bill passed 26-1 and goes to the governor.
- HB2145 by Hammer, which would make a church immune from civil lawsuits over things that happen at the church while it is being used as a polling place during an election. The bill passed 28-1 and goes to the governor.

Elsewhere Thursday, the House Revenue and Taxation Committee approved an amendment to HB 1966, House Speaker Davy Carter's bill to reduce the state's capital gains tax. The amendment by Carter adds language that would increase the standard income tax deduction from \$2,000 to \$2,400.

Carter, R-Cabot, said he worked on the amendment with Rep. Warwick Sabin, D-Little Rock. Sabin has filed a bill that would raise the standard deduction from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

## **Mayflower School District Continues Air Quality Testing (KLRT, Fox 16)**

MAYFLOWER, AR - Mayflower Elementary School is in walking distance to the Northwood subdivision, where the Exxon oil spill caused the evacuation of more than two dozen families.

When the spill first happened, close to a dozen students went home after feeling nauseous.

"We did find there were a few people that just didn't like the smell," said Superintendent of Mayflower Schools, John Gray.

Gray said Exxon paid for air quality tests for all district campuses and passed.

The Arkansas Department of Health gives a thumbs up as well.

We've been working with the schools and there is no evidence at this time to indicate that there any of these volatile compounds associated with the crude oil spill," said Dr. William Mason, Chief

Preparedness & Emergency Response for Arkansas Department of Health.

As for long term effects, Mason adds, the school is safe.

Gray, says overall school attendance has been normal.

---

## **Eureka Springs EAST program gets \$5,000 grant (Lovely County Citizen)**

For the second time, Eureka's EAST program -- Environmental And Spatial Technology -- has received a \$5,000 Schoolyard Habitat grant from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, one of 11 such grants awarded and the maximum grant amount allowed.

EAST Initiative Facilitator Warren Utsler said in a press release that the grant money will go toward the school's Dragon Habitat and Outdoor Classroom Project.

"The project will become part of the district overall Environmental Education program whose goal is to expand outdoor educational opportunities through responsible stewardship of the district's forty-five acre woodland campus," Utsler said. "This project will begin with an outdoor rustic open shelter where middle school students will engage in hands-on learning activities during the school day, and an inspirational after school habitat program guided by Arborist Chris Fischer once a week."

Utsler explained that high school students from the Building Trades and EAST programs will construct the classroom, and middle school students will add native plants and a water feature that will consist of an upper level pond, waterfall, hillside stream and lower basin pond under the guidance of the district's Environmental Education program.

Approximately 25 middle school students in fifth through eighth grades will develop the outdoor classroom and habitat as part of the after-school program, preparing the site and construction of the water feature.

"The outdoor classroom and habitat will serve 185 middle school students, their staff and community," Utsler said. "The district's Environmental Education program is made up of K-12 students, staff, administrators and environmentally conscious community members who will also mentor and advise the project."

Arkansas Game & Fish's Project WILD coordinator Pat Knighten said 24 applications were received from across the state this year and 11 applications were funded. She added, however, that not all were for \$5,000. "That's the maximum allowed," she said.

Successful applicants are eligible to apply for additional funding in subsequent years. A maximum of \$10,000 per school over a five-year period may be awarded administer funding. The Conservation Sales Tax and funds from conservation license plate sales provide funds for this program.

Staff members Berry Griffin at the middle school and Utsler at the high school have both attended an AGFC Schoolyard Habitat workshop and will use the AGFC educational programs and activities to enhance current daily classroom curriculum and after school environmental educational programs.

"The program's hands-on learning activities will have long-term positive affects on reinforcing student learning and behavior," Utsler said in the release. "The classroom and habitat site will improve flora, insect, reptile, bird and animal habitat and allow students a safe supervised place to interact with their environment. The water feature will also benefit the area wildlife that has been under stress from a prolonged record-breaking drought this past year."

He added that the outdoor classroom and habitat will be featured during the school's open house and teacher/parent meetings with student-guided tours.

Middle School Principal Cindy Holt and her staff will have ultimate responsibility for the classroom and habitat, Utsler said, with additional support from the district facilities committee and Environmental Education program. The high school EAST program, the district facilities committee and Environmental Education program will seek additional grants and funding targeted to long-term support and expansion of this project and program.

Knighten at Game & Fish said a formal presentation of the grant will take place soon but details for that event have not yet been confirmed.

---

## **School consolidation measure fails in the AR House (KAIT, Channel 8)**

WEINER/LITTLE ROCK, AR (KAIT) – A measure that would have stopped the consolidation of Arkansas schools until 2015 has failed in the Arkansas House.

According to the Arkansas House web site, House Bill 1938 would suspend administrative reorganizations of school districts. It would also require a study of administrative reorganizations and student transportation in small and rural districts.

The measure would not have allowed the state board to consolidate based on academic distress, fiscal distress, or failure to comply with state accreditation standards after January 1, 2013 and before April 30, 2015.

HB 1938 was one of the last hopes for supporters of Weiner High School in Poinsett County. In March, the State Board of Education voted to close the school and consolidate with Harrisburg High School.